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The Cross and Ministry

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Extract from ["The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne" - Chapter 8.](#)

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:5,6).

When Moses read the law, his face shone, the glory of God was expressed through him as God's servant, God's minister. That, mark you, was under the old covenant, the covenant of signs, the covenant of symbols, of types; yes, and a ministry of death and condemnation: and, says the Apostle, we have another ministry, and ministry is the shining forth of God in the face of Jesus Christ in our hearts. That is what a minister is; and let me put that simply, plainly.

There is no such thing in the New Testament as an official ministry as such. God has never, in this dispensation, appointed officials, as such, to be ministers. The ministry is a matter of a revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ in the heart shining out, and what constitutes one a minister more than another is the measure of the revelation of Christ in the life; and we all ought to be ready to give place to that. It must be a revelation of God in your heart, in my heart, that constitutes us God's ministers.

Now, you see, the Apostle is saying that it is the Cross that constitutes ministry and makes ministers.

"The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in

Christ, there is a new creation: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God" (2 Cor. 5:14-18).

In what context does the Apostle say all that? That has usually been taken as a text for Gospel addresses. It may be very good, but that is not the Apostle's context. See how this letter opens. See the strain that runs through these early chapters. These people have been calling into question his apostleship, his ministry, his right, his position. They have been saying all sorts of things disparagingly of him to try to set him at naught, to put him behind other apostles. He refers to some of these things. We hear him say, The Gospel which was "preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yea and nay". Why does he say that? Because they had been saying, 'He is a yea and nay man; we cannot rely on him. He says a thing and does not do it'. Thus they were setting him at naught. And there are many little things here which indicate that they were questioning his ministry, his apostleship, his credentials: and so he says, 'Because we all died, we do not know one another after the flesh. You are judging on a wrong basis altogether.

The whole question of ministry is not what you may find of human faults in me. The whole question of ministry is, Has God shone into my heart? Is there a ministration of Christ going from me? Have your eyes come to rest upon what I am in myself with all my faults, or are you looking for Christ? If you take that lower ground, you know me after the flesh'. On that ground we deny the Cross. We can all take one or other of these attitudes and positions over servants of God. We can all the time be criticizing their natural defects and faults, focussing upon what we see them to be humanly and naturally. If we do that - knowing them after the flesh - well, we do not give a chance to what is of God. Or we can take the other position. 'Yes, it is quite true he is a very frail, faulty, imperfect man, but I choose rather to let the Cross in between what he is naturally and what he is spiritually, and I look to see if he has something of the Lord. If he has, that is the thing I focus upon'. That is the position in 2 Corinthians, the Cross coming in to deal with the matter of ministry.

First of all, so far as the Corinthians were concerned, it had to make a way for what was of Christ in revelation, and, so far as Paul was concerned, it was to mean a glorious in-shining of Christ.

We are on the heavenly ground and on this heavenly ground we have an open heaven. The credentials of ministry are the shining of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ in our heart, and anybody who has that can be a minister; and anybody who has not that has no right to call himself a minister. The Cross must strike at all ideas of ministry which are merely professional, which are anything other than spiritual. Spiritual gifts, spiritual revelation, spiritual knowledge, spiritual resources, spiritual riches, these alone constitute us ministers.

Galatians - The Cross and Spiritual Fullness

I will just remind you that, as you go on in these letters, you come next to Galatians, and then to Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, and you are simply taking up the Cross in its relationships to different aspects of things, to get things right, to get things into their right realm. You are moving on all the time. First, position was dealt with, then walk, and after that ministry; and then when you get to Galatians, the question before you is, How shall we reach spiritual fullness? The trouble with the Galatians was that they had stopped short. "Ye were running well; who did hinder you...?" They had stopped short and not gone through to the end. It is a question of fullness, and you know what a place the Cross has in Galatians. Oh, in chapter after chapter, the Cross is brought in. "I have been crucified with Christ." Why have I stopped going right on? Because somehow I have come up again from the dead. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I, but Christ." The great objective is Christ.

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). Why have I not gone on? Because the Cross has been nullified in the matter of the world. So the Cross comes in all the time to clear the way for going on to fullness, to finality. That is Galatians - not stopping short of anything of all that God intended.

Ephesians - The Cross and the Eternal Purpose

Ephesians takes you to God's great eternal purpose, and now it is a matter of the corporate life. How shall we know the great, collective, corporate purpose of God from before the foundation of the world, issuing from those Divine counsels in eternity past? How? It will be by the Cross; the eyes of our hearts being enlightened through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Philippians - The Cross and the Fellowship of Saints

Philippians: - yes, now we are in the Church. It is no longer just an individual or personal matter as it has been in Romans and in Corinthians. Now it is a collective matter, and when you come into the Church then the matter of fellowship arises. It is not long before the matter of fellowship arises between Christians, and Euodia and Syntyche get at cross purposes. How are you going to look after fellowship, correct discord among Christians in the same assembly?

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

Let the Cross deal with this matter of mind, which in some form of expression has come in to interrupt and injure this fellowship. Your "mindedness" has to be dealt with. The same principle holds all the way along. So Colossians takes it up in another way.

Sufficient has been said to point out that there is not a point in the Christian life, walk, service or ministry, in the fellowship of the saints, in the purpose of God: there is not a phase but what the Cross needs to be there all the time. The Cross deals with everything that can arise in Christian history and experience to spoil God's thoughts and intentions. Oh, how we need to say, "Jesus, keep me near the Cross"! The Cross is the corrective, the remedy, for what may arise still among Christians. We know only too well these things do still arise amongst Christians, all these marks of immaturity. How shall the matter be dealt with in us and in things, wheresoever we find them like this? Well, there is only one means, namely, the subjective operation of the Cross. Having got the objective side settled once for all, we must allow the Holy Spirit to use the Cross as an instrument to govern us from day to day.